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José M. Blázquez

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Participatory Worlds: Models of Collaborative Textual Production beyond the Entertainment Industry

José M. Blázquez

University of Nottingham

Introduction

> Transgression operates primarily in the context of the mainstream, or the norm, and its boundaries.[1]

Throughout history, demanding participation has commonly been closely related with transgression. If transgression is an action against the rule, so it has been the case with participation in different times and contexts. As Mirko Tobias Schäfer notes, 'participation has been perceived as a key concept to democratization and balancing of inequalities in society, dating back to the civil revolutions and rebellions of the 19th century and the structural transformation of the public sphere'.[2] Occasionally successful, the actions against the establishment taken by the individuals, groups, communities or masses who demanded access to political participation, equal rights and means of production, among other examples, brings along the questioning of social, political, juridical and/or economical norms. Mass participation is, per se, transgressive, since elites have been prone to keep the "power" by excluding others from participating in it. Historically, they have also decided who can participate and benefit from the "system", selecting a sub-set of the whole population based on origin, religion, ideology, gender, race, social-economic status, tradition or any other determined or undetermined criteria. Therefore, elites often have the exclusive agency and authority to enforce, propose, produce, change and approve the "system" rules. Among others, rules set the boundaries between who and what are included and excluded from participating in "the system", and how the relations among the different groups within "the system" will interact. However, the inhabitants (texts, beings, values or ideas) situated in the margins may question the validity and the limits of these boundaries. The transgressive actions or demands of "the otherness" comes from both sides of the line, from inside and outside of the system, ready to demolish or reshape both margins and boundaries.

Participatory story-worlds, fictional worlds where audiences are invited to create canonical content are one of those spaces operating in the margins, located on both sides of the line. Contradicting some mainstream mandates and, in many cases, unable to succeed autonomously, projects based on participatory story-worlds allow audiences to contribute with canonical content towards the expansion of the world. This paper explores the relationship between these projects and entertainment industries to demonstrate how the former is located "in" and "out" of the mainstream. While industries use innovative and

[1] Magdalena Cieslak and Agnieszka Rasmus 2012, 'Introduction', in *Against and Beyond: Subversion and Transgression in Mass Media, Popular Culture and Performance*, ed. by Magdalena Cieslak and Agnieszka Rasmus (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 1-4 (p. 1).

[2] Mirko Tobias Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!: How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p. 41.

inclusive practices for consumers and offer an alternative model for textual production and the expansion of story-worlds, in many cases, they cannot run autonomously from the latter by maintaining the ties with conventions and industry platforms. First, we will examine a general context for the discussion of the topic and some of the key concepts. We will then consider the meaning of participation in participatory worlds and the importance of user agency and authority in these projects. Finally, it will be explained how participatory worlds operate within and outside of the mainstream, providing some examples of the bonds that they maintain with the industry.

Participation and "participatory culture"

While we have already introduced that participation has been a transgressive and key concept in the progress of civilisations, it is important to note that this term has also been transforming throughout history. From the political democracies to the access of means of production, access to participation has played a key role in the development of societies and systems. More recently, the affordability of technological goods led to the democratisation of the means of cultural production. Traditionally, entertainment industries have been producing a commodity (such as books, movies and videogames) and the audiences were passive entities who purchased and consumed the products and services. The communication was, therefore, unilateral, from top to bottom: producers produced while consumers consumed. The evolution of the Internet into what O'Reilly called the 'Web 2.0' enabled consumers to create, modify, remix and circulate data.[3] This transformation of the online environment gave users a voice and opened new channels of communication between producers and consumers.

In recent years, user participation has been envisioned by some academics and gurus as the future of innovation in cultural industries.[4] Users were not only able to contribute to the development and production of a commodity and service but also capable of organising themselves in online communities, sharing ideas, collaborating with other members, and creating some type of scaffolding for newcomers. In a white paper, Henry Jenkins along with other colleagues define "participatory culture' as:

> a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at least, members care about others' opinions on what they have created).[5]

[3] Tim O'Reilly, 'What is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software', *O'Reilly Media* (2005), 1-5 <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> [accessed 1 October 2016].
[4] See, for instance: Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* (New Haven, CT Yale University Press, 2006); Charles Leadbeater, *We-Think: Mass innovation, not mass production* (Glasgow: Profile Books, 2008); and Anthony D. Williams and Don Tapscott, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, New York: Penguin Group, 2006).
[5] Henry Jenkins and others, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 7.

While participatory culture is not inherent to the digital age, the development of the Internet has expanded its possibilities. Needless to say, this concept is closely related to the access to technology, online community building, creativity, and the new skills gained in the digital age.[6] For Jenkins and his colleagues, participatory culture focuses on the production and appropriation of commercial media texts by users or group of users. The production and appropriation occur in three domains: accumulation, archiving and construction. According to Schäfer,

> accumulation describes all activities evolving around texts originally produced within the established media industries. This content is collected, altered, further developed or remixed by users and dedicated fans [...] Archiving refers to organization, maintenance and distribution of digital artefacts [...] Construction describes forms of production that take place outside the established production and distribution channels [...]. The three domains of user activities extend the established culture industries and form a new and complex set of relations between producers and consumers. Instead of replacing them, these new modes complement older modes of production, distribution, and consumption, and can therefore be described as establishing an extended culture industry [...] characterized by the dynamic interaction of all participating parties.[7]

Participatory culture has been especially embraced by fandom, where fans can express and share their interests, motivations and desires concerning their beloved fictional worlds with other fans. In many cases, this appropriation of intellectual property (IP) has been seen by many corporations as a copyright law infringement, which have taken actions against fan communities and individuals.[8] However, other companies have preferred to perceive fandom as a way to promote the brand, extend the lifespan of their products, or even improve their commodities and services. Schäfer also argues that participatory culture happens either inside or outside of the established production and distribution channels and acts as an extension of the cultural industries through the use, adoption, appropriation and monetisation of user-generated content by businesses.

Participation and Entertainment Industries

We will now continue to explore the relationship between participatory practices and entertainment industries in order to further elucidate how participatory worlds are practices which transgress and operate beyond the mainstream production systems. Extending Jenkin's concept of participatory culture, Schäfer's approach of extended cultural industries acknowledges:

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[6] Listed by Jenkins and his colleagues in the report.

[7] Mirko Tobias Schäfer, 'Participation Inside? User Activities between Design and Appropriation', in *Digital Material. Tracing New Media in Everday Life and Technology*, ed. by Marianne van den Boomen and others (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 147-158 (pp. 149-150).

[8] For example, the Warner Brothers crusade to shut down *Harry Potter* fan websites (Aaron Schwabach, 'The Harry Potter Lexicon and the World of Fandom: Fan Fiction, Outsider Works, and Copyright', *University of Pittsburg Law Review*, 70 (2009), 387-434) and, more recently, the cases of Nintendo and Blizzard with the fan-made game *Pokemon Uranium* and the *World of Warcraft* private server, *Nostalrius*, respectively, with similar outcomes.

> production beyond the established channels of corporate product development as well as the ability to incorporate user activities into commercial media production [..]. Participatory culture therefore has to be understood as an extension of the traditional cultural industries into the realm of users.[9]

The author also identifies some participatory media practices as integrated assets in the entertainment industry workflow, while practices outside of the system may create outputs which can be appropriated by media corporations at a later stage. Even though participatory culture may occur aside mainstream media practices, user-generated content could re-enter the sphere of entertainment industries. Although other participatory practices will stay independent and may end in the intellectual commons (such as Linux), they may be re-used by the industry (IBM uses Linux servers, for example). Schäfer's approach presents a very positive, flexible and organic scenario where user contributions and innovation can be adopted by companies and their business models. However, this perception of 'participatory culture' does not alleviate the tensions between producers and consumers. The flexibility that Schäfer talks about has produced new customer-oriented features and platforms but this has also been motivated by the exploitation of 'free-labour' and the attempt to increase brand loyalty among consumers rather than the widespread adaptation of users' participatory practices into the production systems of media industries.[10] As Havens and Lotz notice, 'such a revolution has not yet taken place however, and media with these mandates (mainstream practices and conventions) continue to exist largely at the fringes of the media industries', adding that this is 'a fact that does not necessarily diminish their importance for fans".[11]

When the collaboration between producers and users in the creation of value for a commodity or service is integrated into the production process, we call this participation 'co-creation', 'value co-creation' or 'co-creation of value'. Co-creation can be defined as 'the participation of consumers along with producers in the creation of value in the marketplace'.[12] In this context, consumers are users of a product or service while producers are those who have launched the project (for profit or non-for-profit) or own the IP. The marketplace can be understood as the place where individuals, groups and organizations are exchanging goods and services (with or without monetary retribution). Some considerations should be made in order to better explain the nature of these activities. Vladimir Zwass distinguishes between 'sponsored co-creation'—which 'comprises co-creation activities conducted by consumer communities or by individuals at the behest of an organization (termed the producer)', and 'autonomous co-creation'—where 'individuals or consumer communities produce marketable value in voluntary activities conducted independently of any established organization, although they may be using platforms provided by such organizations, which benefit

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[9] Schäfer, *Bastard Culture!: How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, p. 168.

[10] 'Free labour' works in this context as labour made by audiences which is appropriated or stolen by big corporations. Terranova does not necessarily perceive 'free labour' as exploited labour, but a work given voluntarily in exchange of other intangible rewards -such as the pleasure to share [Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics For the Information Age* (Ann Arbor, MI, Pluto Press, 2004), p. 91].

[11] Timothy Havens and Amanda D. Lotz, *Understanding Media Industries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 38.

[12] Vladimir Zwass, 'Co-creation: Toward a Taxonomy and an Integrated Research perspective', *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 15 (2010), 11–48 (p. 13).

economically', going on to say that '[m]arketable value is not necessarily consigned to the market—it may be placed in the commons, as is the case with Wikipedia'.[13]

On the one hand, Zwass's definition of autonomous co-creation seems a bit vague. While it would cover most of the fandom independent activities (as 'individuals and consumer communities'), it may not cover projects such as Wikipedia, Linux or most participatory worlds, since there are usually 'organizations' (although these are not always well 'established') behind the projects.[14] Besides, this distinction also suggests some blurry areas, particularly in the boundaries between both classifications, since media practices and production systems in the entertainment industries are generally quite opaque. This would make it difficult to estimate, for example, if 'sponsored co-creation' activities are really having an impact to the whole process, if users' contributions are fairly recognised or just appropriated without attribution of the work and determine when (and which kind of) an 'established organization' is behind these participatory practices. On the other hand, Zwass's concepts indicate that participatory culture and cultural industry practices are not opposed or completely isolated from each other but, rather, in constant interaction.

While co-creation in the cultural industries has mainly been studied as an added value to a commodity, brand or service, these approaches have focused on co-creation initiatives sponsored by corporations which mainly base the co-operation between producers and fans on the appropriation of 'free labour'[15] or particular case studies such as *Wikipedia* and *YouTube*.[16] Many companies opted for launching platforms based on or benefiting from user participation (such as *Amazon* and *eBay*) and promoting the creation of brand communities in order to take advantage of the economic value generated by 'free labour' (for example, the consumer support provided by other community members in the brand forums, which example creates value for companies such as Apple, Nikon and Canon). Media giants such as Google and Facebook are good examples of how the industry places ground-breaking participatory tools in the centre of the culture of societies "for free" which are culturally adopted by the Internet community. However, Google and Facebook business models do not consist in selling content to third parties but instead sell users' data to companies in order to display customised advertisements on their platforms or conduct market research. Other participatory practices embraced by the industry respond to marketing campaigns or consumer feedback. Collecting consumers' opinions is nothing particular from the digital age since cultural industries have been doing it before, through conventions, exhibitions, press reviews, surveys, fanzines or traditional mailing. However, user-feedback became more immediate and organised than ever before and companies have used this in their advantage to adapt their products and design marketing campaigns. Customer reviews at Amazon.com are promoted by the platform and encourage sales by the construction of "trust" among the users'

[13] Zwass, p. 11.
[14] In most cases, producers or originators set up a foundation or company behind the project for tax and liability purposes. Wikipedia Foundation, for example, was founded in 2003 by Jimmy Wales.
[15] See Tapscott and Williams 2006; and Charlene Li and Josh Bernhoff, *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2008).
[16] See Phoebe Ayers, Charles Matthews and Ben Yates, *How Wikipedia Works and How you can be part of it* (San Francisco, CA: No Starch Press, 2008); and Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *The YouTube Reader* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009).

community. Fan communities work also as testing grounds for new ideas and feedback, and TV showrunners, screenwriters and editors use them to check audience reactions in order to analyse certain aspects of their shows, such as which characters of the show are more popular among fans.

Sometimes, user-generated content made and shared "for free" is incorporated to the production chain of the commodity; generally, in the shape of marketing material, optional add-ons or quality control. Videogames are good example, where user-generated mods and objects can be added to the company marketplace.[17] As Lawrence Lessig notices, 'turning consumers into creators is the latest fad among companies scrambling for new profits in the digital age'.[18] This fact has also created more friction between fan communities and producers, since the latter commonly do not understand the rules of the tacit agreement. The 'moral economy' is a concept which describes 'the social norms and mutual understandings that make it possible for two parties to conduct a business […]. Economic systems ideally align the perceived interests of all parties involved in a transaction in ways that are consistent coherent and fair'.[19] However, the understanding is frequently not reached, particularly when producers try to impose their terms or do not understand users' and fans' interests and motivations to participate. One example of this is *Fanlib*, a platform which attempted to profit and appropriate fan-fiction posted voluntarily on its site, which eventually closed down because of the constant opposition of fans. *Fanlib* creators did not listen to community needs and instead focused solely on their business plan.[20]

In contrast, entertainment industries and authors may open their IPs to other authors. Shared story-worlds are fictional worlds shared by a number of authors and participatory worlds are a subset of them. This is a common practice in literature and media franchises. However, the media conglomerates do not allow audiences to participate in the creation of official and canonical content but it is instead selected professionals, companies or licensees who will share a common story-world. In this context, we can, widely speaking, identify three general approaches to open a world to other participants: (1) authors may share the world with other selected authors (the model followed by *Cthulhu Mythos* and *Thieves' World*); (2) IP-owners may share the world with authors, licensees and companies (the model used by franchised worlds such as *Marvel Universe* and *Star Wars*); and (3) IP-owners and authors who also share the world with their audiences (participatory worlds). In the first two approaches, audiences are not invited to contribute to the fictional world with canonical content and their

[17] See Héctor Postigo, "Of Mods and Modders: Chasing Down the Value of Fan-Based Digital Game Modifications", *Games and Culture*, 2 (2007), 300-313.
[18] Lawrence Lessig, 'Lucasfilm's Phantom Menace', *Washington Post* (2007), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/11/AR2007071101996.html> [accessed 11 October 2016]. There have been other approaches to explain and analyse user participation, such as academic literature which have drawn differences between the industrial economy or commodity economy and the gift economy [Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013)] or networked information economy (Benkler 2006) in order to contrast the commercial approach taken by media conglomerates to the non-for-profit orientation of many participatory ventures.
[19] Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013, p. 52.
[20] Jenkins, Henry, 'Transforming Fan Culture into User-Generated Content: The Case of FanLib', *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* (2007) <http://henryjenkins.org/2007/05/transforming_fan_culture_into.html> [accessed 3 October 2016].

textual contributions are considered fan fiction. While (trans)Media franchises are possible through the work of many individuals and professionals, authors, professionals and companies participate in the imaginary world by invitation or commission, and licensees commonly have to pay a fee to use the brand and trademarks to generate new content, commodities and/or the advertisement of their own products and services. Media conglomerates maintain a firm grip on their fictional worlds through the control of the IP, which enables them to profit from the same idea across different platforms and formats while reducing the economic risks.[21] Consequently, keeping a tight control over their IPs enable media corporations to develop, expand and exploit their franchised story-worlds. Entertainment industries use production based on the collaboration of many professionals working on the same project in order to create content for their franchises. In some cases, participants will be given credit for their contributions and a retribution for their work but the ownership and copyright of the content will be transferred to the company. Since developing and maintaining franchised story-worlds imply a big investment, media corporations are quite reluctant to attempt new formulas for success and prefer to stick to what has already been tested and worked before.

While participatory practices have proven to be very popular in videogames and software development (such as 'modding' and beta testing), user contributions to the production of fictional narrative content for story-worlds have often had little impact in the development or design of the company's intellectual property.[22] However, user narrative contributions to the story-world are considered fan-fiction (in other words, non-canonical content made by fans). Therefore, more important than the possibility of contributing to the story-world, is how this participation is enabled and the degree of agency and authority that users and communities are given.

Participatory Worlds: Agency and Authority

User agency and authority are two important concepts in participatory story-worlds as well as in participation in general. A participatory world was recently defined by Mark J. P. Wolf as a world which 'allows an audience member to participate in the world and its events, and make permanent changes that result in canonical additions to the worlds'.[23] To make this possible, world-owners have to set up the channels for participation that audience members would need to use in order to contribute with canonical additions to the world and assign them, as well as their users, a certain degree of agency and authority. According to Hammer, agency and authority are two closely related concepts: 'agency describes the capabilities one has in terms of taking action within a space of possibility', whereas 'authority refers to the

[21] Havens and Lotz, p. 191.
[22] In computer science, 'modding' refers to the practice of making modifications to software and hardware. This is commonly done by an end user or a group of end users.
[23] Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012), p. 281.

ability to enforce and judge the results of those actions'.[24] In participatory worlds, user-agency focus on what can be done and the possibilities to contribute. Depending on the project, contributions may be limited to certain formats, media and content. Some restrictions in the user-agency when contributing to the world may include limitations in geographies (a specific space), chronologies (a specific time), characters (specific beings) and objects (specific artefacts).[25] One example is *Grantville Gazette*, an official e-zine based on *1632 universe* where fans and established authors can submit stories which may be published becoming part of canon[26]. Contributions are limited to fictional stories and review articles about specific topics related to the world. The stories have to be located in a specific time and place (mainly in 17th century Europe) and restricted to certain characters (whether authors want to use a citizen from Grantville or other author's characters) and objects (avoiding the use of other authors' important objects and anything which would not look plausible in the world).

In addition to the compliance with the above restrictions, in participatory worlds the selection process of the contributions to be part of the story-world canon may also include additional filters (such as the quality and suitability of the content and the restriction of additional aspects and topics). In *Runes of Gallidon*, a human-centric medieval imaginary world, contributions were accepted in a wide-range of formats, genres and media.[27] All contributions were accepted as long as they adhered to the requirements and guidelines. For example, the producers rejected contributions which denigrated other author's characters, contained pornography and copyrighted works, and included magical beings such as elves and orcs.

Authority is related to the decision making process in which the producers will commonly have the last word about what is acceptable and what is not in the story-world. However, users and communities may have a certain degree of power to oppose decisions made by the producers, review and suggest changes in other members' contributions and propose works submitted by other participants to be part of canon (for example, through discussions in forums, supportive comments, votes and feedback). In *Grantville Gazette*, contributions have to be posted in the forum where the community can review them and give feedback to their authors. Once the story is improved and completed, it will get more chances to be accepted for publication. It is worth mentioning that, as frequently happens in participatory worlds, not every contribution, contributor and channel of participation may receive the same degree of agency and authority. For example, user feedback may be less effective when submitted by one audience member than if submitted by a group. Similarly, some contributors may have more visibility and consideration due to the quality and/or quantity of their previous contributions or their long-lasting membership.

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[24] Jessica Hammer, 'Agency and Authority in Role-Playing "Texts"', in *A New Literacies Sampler*, ed. by Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 67-94 (p. 72).
[25] See Scott Walker, 'Scoping the Audience Participation', *Shared Story Worlds* (2011) <https://sharedworlds.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/scoping-the-audience-participation/> [accessed 12 November 2016].
[26] Eric Flint, *Grantville Gazette* (2003) <https://grantvillegazette.com/wp/>.
[27] Scott Walker, *Runes of Gallidon* (2008) <http://runesofgallidon.com>.

Even though there are always restrictions to the agency and authority, through these two concepts, participatory worlds give audiences an active role in the production processes and provide communities and individuals with a degree of autonomy within the project. This helps to re-shape the relationship between producers and consumers. Needless to say, assigning agency and authority to audience members who wish to contribute to the story-world is an uncommon practice in media franchises which transgresses industry norms. As explained earlier, audience participation is restricted and allowed contributions merely focus on customer feedback and suggestions. Users may also influence producers' decisions in very different ways, even when there are not official channels to do it. A few cases are accounted where fan boycotts and protests have made corporations withdraw their plans to cancel or make unpopular changes in some TV shows.[28] However, it is often the case that the impact of user-actions in demonstrating opposition to or support for a brand or commodity has more of an effect on their image and sales than on the proper content to be produced.

The way of influencing the story-world is an important aspect to differentiate the mainstream practices from participatory story-worlds. Participatory story-worlds are imaginary worlds where audience members can make significant contributions towards the expansion and development of the world in a canonical and active way. Therefore, participants have the chance of becoming collaborators or co-authors. In contrast, entertainment industries do not allow them to participate in the production of canonical content for their IPs. Fan communities have an important role in participatory story-worlds and are frequently given a certain degree of authority in the decision making process within the established channels to contribute. These channels are constructed to enable the textual production process and the collaboration between producers and audience members. The different approaches to audience participation place participatory worlds as a practice outside of the mainstream.

'In' and 'out' of the mainstream

Commonly, projects based on participatory worlds are independent ventures, community-centred and located in the margins of the mainstream practices of the textual production. They may work as an extension of the entertainment industries but also act as an alternative to them. As we have already explained, participatory worlds allow audience participation in the production of canonical content, which is a practice situated outside of the mainstream. However, participatory worlds also operate within the mainstream. While their nature and production system is very different from media franchises, there are some common aspects that they may share, such as a common market (generally speaking), conventions (such as genres, formats and patterns), platforms, and a hierarchic structure in the decision making process (which generally leave the IP owner the last word). In this section, we will describe some of the links that participatory worlds frequently keep with entertainment industries, which place them "within the mainstream".

[28] See Roberta Pearson, 'Fandom in the Digital Era', *Popular Communication*, 8 (2010), 84–95 (p. 86).

For example, participatory worlds and franchised story-worlds may share the same market, but nonetheless the products are aimed at both similar and different target audiences. They approach a similar audience when the product is addressed to those who consume and, eventually, may want to participate to the world, while participatory worlds would also attempt to entice individuals and groups who are interested in participatory spaces. Similarly, some mainstream conventions and forms of organisation may be used by participatory worlds. In *Bar Karma*, a TV show aired on *Current TV*, and which allowed audience members to participate in production process, contributions were evaluated and tweaked by a group of professionals before being voted for by the community and, eventually, adapted to be used in the show.[29]. Besides, *Bar Karma* was following mainstream genre (sci-fi), format (12 episodes of 22 minutes) and narrative conventions in the structure of the episodes (traditional four-act structure for television).

However, the most visible link that participatory worlds maintain with the entertainment industries (per se) is the use of their platforms. Building own platforms to produce, advertise and circulate content, allow user-participation and/or generate revenue requires an important amount of resources. Since participatory worlds are commonly projects with low budgets and limited assets, it is quite common to find examples of these projects using industry platforms (contracted or free-to-use) to carry out their activities. The dependence that participatory worlds-based projects have on these platforms to operate reduces their autonomy and keeps them connected to the mainstream system.

Firstly, participatory worlds frequently make use of pre-existing platforms owned by the industry to circulate and distribute the content. Probably the most widespread example is the use of *Amazon*. *Grantville Gazette* sells its issues via *Amazon* and *Baen Books eARC* (Advance Reader Copies—which allow readers to subscribe and purchase digital volumes). The printed issues are published by Baen Books. Besides this, these circulation platforms may also serve to enable participatory channels for the audience to contribute. For example, *The Hunted.tv*, a video-based project featuring vampires and their slayers, uses *Youtube* as a channel to enable participation.[30] Fans can record their own stories based on the story-world, upload them on *Youtube*, and share the link with the IP owner, who awards $1,000 to the best contribution.

Sometimes, the use of industry platforms may also have a key role in the project, determining the visual representation and/or mechanics of the story-world. This is, for example, the case of MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) private servers which use commercial video games in the market to develop their story-worlds.[31] Fictional worlds can be original or based on copyrighted worlds (such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Dungeons & Dragons*).[32] Video games may also shape the dynamics and mechanics of the

[29] Albie Hecht and Will Wright for Current TV, *Bar Karma* (2011).
[30] Robert Chapin, *The Hunted.tv* (2011) <http://www.thehunted.tv>.
[31] In MMORPGs, a server is a programme which manages the players' access to the setting (or module) to be played.
[32] If canon is validated and determined by the author and/or IP-owner, we can argue that MMORPG private servers based on copyrighted story-worlds would work in the domains of fandom, while servers rooted on original worlds may be participatory worlds when allow audience participation as explained in this paper.

world, depending on the possibilities they offer. *Neverwinter Nights*[33] and *Minecraft* based MMORPG private servers, for example, feature copyrighted worlds and original ones.[34] The possibilities that the game offers (for example, the character skills, the combat system and the physics laws of the world) and its visual appearance also determine how the world is shaped and represented.

There are other cases where the organisations behind participatory worlds get support from the entertainment industries and/or work with them. For example, the participatory platform *Theatrics.com*, which produced the participatory world *Beckinfield*, worked for clients such as NBC Universal, USA Network, Harlequin Publishing and Wikia.com.[35] While *Bar Karma* was an independent project, it was created by important names in the media industry and produced by *Current TV*, an indie TV channel co-founded by Al Gore.

Finally, there are participatory worlds which work more independently from entertainment industry platforms, such as *Runes of Gallidon*, which had its own website and participatory platform. The producers of this project also built a legal framework behind the story-world to allow everyone to re-use other participants' ideas. Even though this project eventually used *Amazon* to sell some of the content, this does not diminish its independent nature. If participatory worlds do not use any mainstream platform for promotion, participation or circulation, they would hardly get support and visibility. We only need to consider how social media changed our lifestyles and the online presence of businesses and brands to understand the need of participatory worlds to maintain a tie with the mainstream. However, we have also seen other examples where the industry platforms are integral parts of the project.

Conclusions

Bringing back Schäfer's notion of participatory culture working as an extension of the cultural industries, we have seen how participatory worlds operate within and outside of the mainstream. They can be supported or influenced by the entertainment industries but also present a production model very different from them. Participatory worlds operate in a collaborative space where individuals and communities can contribute and test their ideas while still protected by some legal framework. This makes it more difficult for industries to appropriate "user-generated content" than in the case of fan communities. Their location is in the margins, making participatory worlds either an alternative or extension of entertainment industries.

In this paper, we have presented participation as a key and transgressive concept throughout history and how this relates to 'participatory culture'. After, it was explained that participatory culture may operate as an extension of cultural industries, but also as an alternative to their products and services, while demonstrating participatory worlds as creative spaces for collaboration between producers and audiences operating from both

[33] Bioware, *Neverwinter Nights* (2002), Microsoft Windows and subsequently other platforms.
[34] Mojang, *Minecraft* (2011), Microsoft Windows, OS X, Linux and subsequently other platforms.
[35] Tracy Evans, Bob Gebert and Biff van Cleve, *Beckinfield* (2010).

within and without the mainstream. Participatory story-worlds give a degree of agency and authority to audience members, who can contribute to the fictional world with canonical content. This transgressive practice is not shared with entertainment industries which look for securing their investments with formulas that have previously worked commercially. Besides, for the entertainment industries, there is a clear separation of roles. They keep a tight control over their IPs and carefully select a group of creators (authors, companies and licensees) who will be entitled to produce commodities and services based on their story-worlds and brands. Generally, these creators will maintain the distance with the audience which is relegated to its consumer role. Audiences consume what producers produce. This separation of roles is more blurred in participatory story-worlds which challenges some of the principles of the mainstream media production systems. Although, participatory story-worlds and franchised story-worlds do not have a common production model, they both share common features, such as the use of a common market, similar decision making processes, and industry-owned platforms for the production and circulation of texts. While the production model of participatory worlds differs from entertainment industries systems, the above-mentioned connections to mainstream practices and platforms frequently means a lower degree in their autonomy.

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